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FOR THE MOST PART

UNOBSERVED, OR NOT DULY NOTICED,

RESPECTING

VARIOLOUS CONTAGION.

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FACTS,

&c.

In my second and third Treatises on the Vaccine Disease I endeavoured to call the attention of my readers to some physiological facts respecting the nature of the small-pox infection, which I considered of great importance, foreseeing that they would eventually become connected with vaccination. As the publications to which I allude, have been for some time out of print; and as the subject is by no means generally understood, I shall now make such Extracts from them relating to this matter as I conceive may prove useful, and add some further observations in confirmation of the facts I then advanced.

EXTRACTS*.

"It should be remembered that the constitution cannot, by previous infection, be rendered *totally* unsusceptible of the variolous poison; neither the casual, nor the inoculated small-pox, whether it

* Further Observations on the Variolæ Vaccinæ, published in 1799, page 116.

 produces

produces the disease in a mild or in a violent way, can *perfectly* extinguish the susceptibility. The skin, we know, is ever ready to exhibit, though generally in a very limited degree, the effects of the poison when inserted there: and how frequently do we see eruptions on nurses when much exposed to the contagion, and these sometimes preceded by sensible illness; yet, should any thing like an eruption appear, or the smallest degree of indisposition, upon the insertion of the variolous matter on those who have gone through the cow-pox, my assertions respecting the peculiarities of the disease might be unjustly discredited."

"I know a gentleman who many years ago was inoculated for the small-pox; but having no pustules, or scarcely any constitutional affection, he was dissatisfied, and has since been repeatedly inoculated. A vesicle has always been produced in the arm in consequence, with axillary swelling and a slight indisposition *. This is by no means a rare occurrence."

"On the arm of a person who many years before had gone through the cow-pox, I once produced a vesication by the insertion of variolous matter, and with a little of the fluid inoculated a young woman, who had a mild, but very efficacious small-pox in consequence, although no constitutional effect was produced on the patient from whom the matter was taken."

* This gentleman, Mr. Gardner, of Frampton upon Severn, Glostershire, has since informed me, that eruptions appeared on one of the inoculations, but did not maturate.

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" The following communication from Mr. Fewster (an eminent surgeon at Thornbury in Glocestershire) affords a still clearer elucidation of this fact. Mr. Fewster says, ' On the 3d of April 1797 ' I inoculated Master H——, aged fourteen months, for the small-' pox. At the usual time he sickened, had a plentiful eruption, parti-' cularly on his face, and got well. His nurse-maid, aged twenty-four, ' had many years before gone through the small-pox in the natural way, ' which was evident from her being much pitted with it. She had used ' the child to sleep on her left arm, with her left cheek in contact with his ' face, and during his inoculation he had mostly slept in that manner. ' About a week after the child got well, she (the nurse) desired me to ' look at her face, which she said was very painful. There was a ' plentiful eruption on the left cheek, but not on any other part of the ' body, which went on to maturation. On inquiry I found, that three ' days before the appearance of the eruptions she was taken with slight ' chilly fits, pain in her head and limbs, and some fever. On the ' appearance of the eruptions these pains went off, and on the second ' day of the eruption she complained of a little sore throat. On the ' fifth day I charged a lancet from two of the pustules, and on the ' next day inoculated two children, one two years, the other four ' months old, with the matter: at the same time I inoculated the ' mother and eldest sister with variolous matter taken from Master ' H——. On the fifth day after their inoculation all their arms ' were inflamed alike; and on the eighth the eldest of those inocu-' lated from the nurse sickened, and the youngest on the eleventh ' day. They had both a plentiful eruption, from which I inoculated ' several others, who had the disease very favourably: the mother

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'and the other child sickened about the same time, and likewise had 'a plentiful eruption.'

"These are not brought forward as uncommon occurrences, but as exemplifications of the human system being susceptible of the variolous contagion, although it has been previously rendered sensible of its action."

The following extract is taken from "A Continuation of Facts and Observations on the Variolæ Vaccinæ," published in 1800, page 177.

"In my former treatises on this subject, I have remarked that the human constitution retains its susceptibility of the small-pox contagion (both from effluvia and contact), after previously feeling its influence. In further corroboration of this declaration, many facts have been communicated to me by various correspondents. I shall select one of them, extracted from a letter from Mr. Miles.

'As I conceive what I am now about to communicate to be of some 'importance, I imagine it cannot be uninteresting to you, especially 'as it will serve to corroborate your assertion, that the human system 'is susceptible of the variolous contagion, although it has previously 'been made sensible of its action. In November 1793 I was desired 'to inoculate a person with the small-pox. I took the variolous 'matter from a child under the disease in the natural way, who had 'a large burden of distinct pustules. The mother of the child being 'desirous of seeing my method of communicating the disease by 'inoculation,

'inoculation, after having opened a pustule, I introduced the point 'of my lancet in the usual way on the back of my own hand, and 'thought no more of it until I felt a sensation in the part which re-'minded me of the transaction. This happened on the third day; 'on the fourth there were all the appearances common to inoculation, 'at which I was not at all surprised, nor did I feel myself uneasy, 'upon perceiving the inflammation continue to increase to the sixth 'and seventh day, accompanied with a very small quantity of fluid, 'repeated experiments having taught me it might happen so with 'persons who had undergone the disease, and yet would escape any 'constitutional affection: but I was not so fortunate; for on the 'eighth day I was seized with all the symptoms of the eruptive fever, '*but in a much more violent degree than when I was before inoculated*, 'which was about eighteen years previous to this, when I had a con-'siderable number of pustules. I must confess I was now greatly 'alarmed, although I had been much engaged in the small-pox, 'having at different times inoculated not less than two thousand 'persons. I was convinced my indisposition proceeded from the in-'sertion of the variolous matter, and therefore anxiously looked for 'an eruption. On the tenth day I felt a very unpleasant sensation of 'stiffness and heat on each side of my face near my ears, and the fever 'began to decline. The affection of my face terminated after the 'appearance of three or four eruptions, attended with inflammation, 'but which did not maturate.

'T. Miles, Surgeon.

'*Stanley St. Leonard's.*'

Mr.

Mr. Fewster, the gentleman whose communications on this subject I have inserted, who had in the course of a long practice attended thousands with the small-pox, without being sensible of its impression, was himself an instance of insecurity from its effects when the virus was inserted into the skin; for on accidentally puncturing his finger with the point of a lancet recently dipped in small-pox matter, a pustule appeared on the part. He had pain in the axilla, a severe attack of fever ensued, commencing with rigor, and several eruptions appeared on his forehead, some of which partially maturated.

It is remarkable too, that in the same town (Thornbury in Glostershire) another medical gentleman, Mr. Scott, had a very copious and general eruption of small-pox after an assiduous attendance on a person who had the disease in a very violent degree. The eruption was preceded by an attack of fever so severe as to send him to his bed. Mr. Scott's countenance at this time was not only pitted, but actually scarred by the small-pox, which he had by inoculation many years before this second seizure. The pustules did not go through their course, but died away much sooner than in ordinary small-pox.

Without going into a detail of cases of this description, which have from time to time been laid before the public in great numbers, by gentlemen of the medical profession, I need only remark, that there is scarcely a town or village which cannot bear testimony to facts of a similar kind. One of the most remarkable, perhaps, on record is the following, which was communicated to the Medical Society of

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London by Mr. Edward Withers, surgeon, of Newbury, Berkshire. As it is given with so much precision, I shall extract it from their Memoirs, vol. iv. art. xiii.

" Mr. Richard Langford, a farmer, of West Shefford, Berkshire, about fifty years of age, when about a month old had the small-pox, at a time when three others of the family underwent the same disease, one of whom, a servant man, died with it. Mr. Langford's countenance was strongly indicative of the malignity of the distemper, his face being so remarkably pitted and seamed, as to attract the notice of all who saw him, so that no one could entertain a doubt about his having had that disease in the most inveterate manner; moreover, it was usual for him also, whenever the small-pox happened among the poor of his parish, to attend and assist in accommodating them with all necessaries.

" On the 8th of May 1775, I was desired to visit this person, from whom I learned, that about a fortnight before, on overheating himself, he became indisposed, and continued so for two days, when he became well, and had continued so until the day before I saw him; when he was seized with chills, pain in his back and head, &c. &c. with a considerable degree of fever. I directed for him such medicines as circumstances indicated. On visiting him the following day I found him much the same, and I directed a continuance of his aperient and febrifuge medicines. I saw him again early on the morning of the tenth, when his fever was somewhat abated, and indeed a mitigation of all his symptoms. The succeeding day I found

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him still better, but complaining of a rash, which the family then informed me, they had perceived very early the morning before, but which they forgot to mention to me, and which had escaped *my* notice, his chamber being a very dark one.

" On examining this eruption, which was now not limited to his face alone, but extended to his arms, breast, and body, its appearance so much resembled the small-pox, that I told the family I should not have hesitated in pronouncing it to be so, if his having had that distemper had not been so notorious. The next day the eruption was universal; his throat also, which he had complained of the day before, was now become more troublesome, and indeed every other appearance so much favoured the idea of the disease being variolous, as to induce me to give the most decided opinion of its being so, and to desire that there might be no communication or intercourse with any of his friends, who had not had that disease. This opinion was ridiculed, and consequently but little attention paid to the precaution. In the progress of this case, the advancement of the pustules, the swelling of the face and head, and that smell peculiar to the disease, as well as every other circumstance, still more and more confirmed me in the opinion I had given.

" Reflecting on the singularity of the case, I desired on the eighth day from the invasion, that a physician might visit him; accordingly Dr. Collet, then a resident in this place, was desired to see him: considering how necessary it was that the nature of this case should be investigated in the fullest manner, I requested Dr. Hulbert, a physi-

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cian of eminence here, would attend with Dr. Collet on my own account. This measure appeared to me the more necessary, as the whole neighbourhood held my opinion in contempt; even Dr. Hulbert, to whom the patient was well known, laughed at my idea of its being small-pox; however, both those gentlemen, on visiting the patient, pronounced it to be so. As the patient himself never could be reconciled to the opinion of his case being small-pox, he was disinclined to pursue the means recommended, and his surrounding friends being of the same opinion were the less inclined to enforce the use of them, and Dr. Hulbert (though desirous of continuing his attendance without any fee) was dismissed after his second visit. Under these disadvantages he had but an indifferent chance of recovery from a bad confluent distemper; he died on the twenty-first day from the seizure.

" Four of the family, as also a sister of the patient's, to whom the disease was conveyed by her son's visiting his uncle, falling down with the small-pox, fully satisfied the country with regard to the nature of the disease, which nothing short of this would have done: the sister died.

" This case was thought so extraordinary a one, as to induce the rector of the parish to record the particulars of it in the parish register.

" *Newbury*,
" *March* 20, 1791."

There is every gradation then, from that point in which the contagion of the small-pox excites no sensible indisposition or marks of its presence, up to that which admits of the reappearance of the disease in such a degree as to prove destructive.

That the small-pox may be received after supposed security, and yet, like the cow-pox, pass imperceptibly through the constitution, is a fact sufficiently proved by the following striking example:

About five years ago I was requested by Dr. Croft to vaccinate the infant of Mrs. W. a lady in Portland Place. The vaccine fluid, which was inserted fresh from the arm of another infant, produced scarcely any effect beyond a little efflorescence on the part, which in a few days disappeared. On expressing my surprise at this, such an occurrence happening very rarely, Mrs. W. soon removed my embarrassment by the following narrative:

A few days previous to her confinement she met a very disgusting object, whose face was covered with the small-pox. The smell and appearance of the poor creature affected her much at the time; and though she mentioned the circumstance on her return home, she had no idea that her infant could suffer from it, having had the small-pox herself when a child. During a few days after its birth her little one seemed quite well, but on the fifth day it became indisposed, and on the seventh the small-pox appeared. The pustules, which were few in number, maturated completely. Dr. Croft, who attended her, being curious to know the effect of

inoculation

inoculation from one of the pustules, put some of the matter taken from one of them into the hands of a gentleman eminently versed in that practice, which produced the disease correctly. Mrs. W. was not sensible of any indisposition herself from this exposure, nor had she any appearance of the small-pox.

This case then decisively proves, that the small-pox virus may affect the human frame, even to its inmost recesses, although apparently secured from its effects, and yet give no evidence of its presence by exciting any perceptible disorder.

Another case, in its general character similar to the above, was lately communicated to me by Mr. Henry Gervis, a surgeon of eminence at Ashburton, in Devonshire. Mr. Gervis says, "The small-pox having appeared in the village of Woolson Green, about three miles from Ashburton, on the sixth of May 1808 I vaccinated a poor woman, the wife of James Baskwell, who was in the last month of her pregnancy. Her three children had been inoculated the preceding day with variolous matter by the surgeon who attended the poor of the parish, and who had very properly declined inoculating her also from her particular situation. I made two punctures in each arm, each of which fortunately succeeded, and she regularly passed the disorder, complaining only on the tenth and eleventh days, when the areola was most extended, as is usual. I saw her very frequently during the progress of her disorder, and once or twice after its complete termination: I therefore can speak positively, that during that time she laboured under no symptom but what is connected with

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the cow-pox. From this period she continued perfectly well, and on Saturday last the 11th instant she was delivered of a female child, having at the time of its birth many eruptions on it, bearing much the appearance of small-pox in the early stage of the disease. This event happened five weeks after her vaccination, and one month after she had been exposed to the variolous infection of her own three children, and that of several others in the same village. On the 14th I visited the child again, when I found the eruptions had increased to some thousands, perfectly distinct, and their character well marked. Many among the most respectable physicians and surgeons from Totnes, Ashburton, and the neighbourhood, were kind enough, at my request, to come to the poor woman's place of abode, and witness the fact. But to put the matter beyond all doubt, I armed some lancets with the virus, and produced the small-pox by inoculating with it. On the 18th the infant was seized with slight convulsions, and on the morning of the 19th it expired.

"In addition to the circumstance of the mother's conveying the variolous infection to her unborn child, without feeling any indisposition from its action on her own constitution, I must remark that there cannot be a stronger proof of the efficacy of vaccine inoculation than this case affords. But happily proofs are not wanted, or I could give my testimony to a great extent."

Without producing more examples of a similar description at present, though many are before me, I shall conclude by observing, that a fact

a fact, not unlike the preceding, fell under the observation of Dr. Mead, who, in his Discourse on the Small-pox (chap. iv. page 337, edit. 1772) says, "A certain woman, who had formerly had the small-pox, and was now near her reckoning, attended her husband in the distemper. She went her full time, and was delivered of a dead child. It may be needless to observe that she did not catch it on this occasion; but the dead body of the infant was a horrid sight, being all over covered with the pustules; a manifest sign that it died of the disease before it came into the world."

In the foregoing pages I have preferred the insertion of extracts from early publications to the detail of many new observations, as it must preclude cavil on the score of its being an after-thought. My principal object is, to guard those who may think fit to inoculate with variolous matter, after vaccination, from unnecessary alarms: a pustule may sometimes be thus excited, as on those who have previously gone through the small-pox; febrile action in the constitution may follow; and, as has been exemplified, a slight eruption.

At the commencement of vaccination I deemed this test of security necessary; but I now feel confident that we have one of equal efficacy, and infinitely less hazardous, in the reinsertion of the vaccine lymph.

November 18, 1808.

S. Gosnell, Printer,
Little Queen Street.

The following case, which has been communicated to me since the preceding pages were printed, so forcibly exemplifies the fact I wish to establish, that I have thought proper to subjoin it.

Extract of a Letter from J. KENT, *Esq. dated Naval Hospital, Plymouth,* 18*th Oct.* 1809.

" Some years ago Mr. WILLIAM WILSON, a surgeon in Greenock, North Britain, inoculated my eldest son (then about a year old) for the small-pox, of which he had an immense number: at that period my wife, who was far advanced in her pregnancy, attended him with maternal affection, and he almost constantly sat upon her knee. About the time the small-pox was beyond its height, and the pustules were drying up, she was delivered of a daughter, who is now living, and, when born, a large number of the small-pox appeared upon her, particularly about the head and face. The pustules maturated completely, and so satisfied was every medical gentleman who saw her, as well as myself and others, that she had had the small-pox, that I never thought of inoculating her. My wife, who had the small-pox at an early period of life, found no appearance of the disorder, or any indisposition whatever in consequence, either before or after her delivery. I have had a numerous family, who were all inoculated for the small-pox, and this daughter was continually among them during the various stages of the disorder without receiving the infection."

S. GOSNELL, Printer, Little Queen Street, London.